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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

44  
4 August 1950

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 315

SUBJECT: Possible Soviet Use of Japanese Prisoners of War

1. The USSR would like to obtain control of Japan and Japan is now exceptionally vulnerable to attack. It is not likely, however, that the Soviet Union will attempt to use the Japanese prisoners of war under its control for action against Japan. Even if a possible 100,000 troops had been converted into a reliable military force for the purpose — an assumption which is unlikely and unsupported by evidence — they would be unable to gain permanent possession of Japan for the USSR. Inasmuch as it would be impossible for the POW's to invade Japan without Soviet consent and Soviet aid, it would be extremely difficult for the USSR to dissociate itself from the act as was done with Korea. An invasion would mean an increase in the present drain on US military power, but it would also accelerate US mobilization (or provoke total mobilization), and would greatly increase the risk of global war. The Japanese people would resist the invasion and would be strongly united against Communism and the USSR. Conversely, they would be ready for an active rather than a passive alignment with the West. The USSR would also have to take into account the possibility that a US countermove would be the immediate rearming of Japan.

2. According to official Japanese Government figures, 309,000 Japanese POW's and civilians still remain unaccounted for in Soviet territory. Reports indicate that at least 70,000, and probably as many as 150,000, have died since 1945. Taking further into account the civilians in the group and those who must now be too old for military service, it is probable that less than 100,000 could be used effectively for military action. In addition, an undetermined number (possibly 60,000) are attached to the Chinese Communist army and might be detached for service in Japan.

Note: This estimate of the possibility that the USSR will employ Japanese prisoners of war in hostile acts against Japan was undertaken at the request of the Department of Defense.

This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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NO CHANGE in Class. ☐

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3. Communist indoctrination of the POW's has been undertaken as a matter of routine, but there is insufficient evidence to show that the group, or any large part of it, has been given military training.

4. Japanese Communist Party plans are not known. The Party's reactions to SCAP's recent "purge" of its leaders and suspension of its principal newspapers have been unexpectedly weak; the Party's failure to take advantage of the opportunity for sabotage offered through US involvement in Korea at a time when the Japanese police force is still not strong enough to cope with the situation, is unexplained. (The Japanese police force is to be increased by 75,000 but the new force will not be recruited, trained and ready for a minimum of three months.) Although there is no evidence to indicate that the Party plans to take violent action in the near future or to use the Soviet-held POW's in conjunction with it, the Communists do possess potential for sabotage which has not been utilized to date.

5. On the unlikely assumption that a large proportion of the POW's had been trained and equipped and could be transported to Japan (presumably by the USSR, which could provide the necessary transportation), it would probably be possible for the POW's to secure some of the islands but not to hold them for more than a short time. Hokkaido would seem the most likely target for direct attack or limited infiltration because it is the island most accessible from Soviet territory. It is also the least well defended and is an area in which the Communists have shown considerable interest. The Japanese people would unite against a Soviet-inspired invasion by the POW's, and, if armed, could soon organize themselves into a force probably capable of repelling it. Small, highly-trained groups of POW's could be landed in Japan clandestinely and could be used effectively against the Government and the Occupation.

6. Little can be said about the possible timing of the assumed Soviet move beyond the fact that the next two or three months will probably be the time of Japan's greatest military vulnerability to this type of attack and therefore the most favorable time for an invasion if one is contemplated.

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